

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRA MILITARIA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1200

W.S. 1,200

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,200

Witness

Cornelius O'Regan,
Monaparson,
Mourne Abbey,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Mallow Battalion Column;
O/C. Signals Mallow Battalion.

Subject.

Mourne Abbey Company Irish Volunteers,
1916-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY CORNELIUS O'REGAN,

Monaparson, Mourne Abbey, Co. Cork.

I was born at Monaparson, Mourne Abbey, where I now reside, in May 1898. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Analeentha National School, where I was in attendance until I reached the age of 16.

I have already made a joint statement with Messrs. Liam Jones and Paddy McCarthy in respect of the period to Easter Week, 1916. Our joint statement concluded with our version of the activities of the Mourne Abbey Company of the Irish Volunteers on Easter Sunday, 1916, when we paraded at Beeing Cross and, having carried out some exercises in conjunction with other units assembled there, were addressed by the O/C Cork Brigade - Tomás MacCurtain.

On the evening of Easter Monday, 1916, rumours were current in the area that something unusual had happened in Dublin. Several members of the Company (Mourne Abbey) from Monaparson area - amongst them Paddy Buckley, Jack McCarthy, Jerh. Mullane, Jerh. Cronin and witness - assembled that evening and decided to visit the local stationmaster (Tom Manning), who was the most likely person to have some news. He had no definite news but about 8 p.m. he was called to the station to take a telephone message. When he returned to his own home, where we were waiting, he informed us that he had received word from Mallow that "there were no trains out of Dublin". We then knew that there was "something on" and we decided to "stand to" and await instructions. No instructions were received during the week.

Sometime towards the end of the week following Easter all members of the company were summoned to a meeting at Burnfort. Like all the other Volunteers, I thought that this meeting was to be a normal parade. However, when we reached Burnfort we found that the meeting had been called by the committee, which had controlled the Irish Volunteers up to this. This committee was composed of representatives of the political parties in the area, viz. O'Brienites (all for Ireland League Party) and Redmondites (Irish Parliamentary Party). The members of the committee were all older men and none of them were active members of the Irish Volunteers. Amongst the members of this committee were: Patrick Curtin (Chairman), Dan Leary (Vice Chairman) and Jerh. Cronin (Treasurer).

The Chairman (Patrick Curtin) of the committee, who presided at the meeting, appealed to the Volunteers to surrender their arms to the local Catholic Curate (Fr. Sheedy). He expressed the view that they (the committee) would all be arrested and interned and stressed the point that, being old men, they could not afford to be away from their homes and families. He stated that Fr. Sheedy had received a communication from the local Sergeant of the R.I.C. in which it was suggested that the arms should be placed in the stable at the Catholic Curate's house and undertaking that, if this was done, there would be no raids or arrests. The R.I.C. were to collect the arms next day. The proposal gave rise to a heated debate and the Chairman called for a show of hands. A number of hands were raised in support of the proposal to surrender the arms, but as this party appeared to be in a minority the Chairman asked if there were any more in favour of the

proposition. At this stage I interjected "Are there any more cowards"?, and the Analeentha section of the company, to which I belonged, refused to surrender any arms and left the meeting.

Some arms were left in the stable at Fr. Sheedy's house but as the R.I.C. did not collect them next day (they did not call for them until two days after the meeting) the Volunteers in the Burnfort area, who were opposed to the surrender, removed any arms which were any good and left a store of useless arms behind. This concluded the activities in connection with Easter Week, 1916, in the Mourne Abbey area.

The members of the Analeentha section, who were all opposed to the surrender of arms, continued to meet as usual. They were all the time discussing ways and means of improving the organisation of the Volunteers in the area. About September, 1916, I went to Macroom sports with Jerry Mullane and Jack Looney, where Jerry Mullane met some Volunteers from Cork City who had been on a training course with him at Sheare's St., Cork, prior to Easter Week. He informed us that he was going to a meeting with some of these Volunteers and would be away for an hour or so. Jerry Mullane went to this meeting and on the way home he told me that it was proposed to re-organise the Irish Volunteers in Cork City. I suggested that we should take similar action in Mourne Abbey area. Shortly after this Mullane left the area and took up a job in Cork City.

Following Mullane's departure the Volunteers in Analeentha continued to meet as usual. I do not remember whether we had any officers at this time, but on the

anniversary of Easter Week we decided to hoist the tricolour on Mourne Abbey Castle and on a high tree near Analeentha Church. The flags were placed in position during the night, and when the R.I.C. observed them next day they immediately set about removing the flag on the tree at Analeentha. In order to do so the local Sergeant of the R.I.C. with one of his constables set about sawing down the tree on which the flag was flying. After some hours' hard work, during which they were watched by a big crowd, which included several Volunteers, they succeeded in felling the tree. Immediately the tree had been felled the watching crowd rushed to get the flag, and the R.I.C. party had laboured in vain as the flag was seized by the Volunteers. The R.I.C. party tried to recapture the flag and this led to several clashes, but the enemy party withdrew without the flag. Arising out of this incident, the following members of the unit were arrested: "Pats" Curtin, Tim Riordan, Jerh. Cronin, John Cronin. They were charged with unlawful assembly and obstructing the R.I.C. in the discharge of their duty.

It was about this time that the first full parade of the Mourne Abbey Company since Easter Week was held. This was on the occasion of the funeral of Jerry Mullane - late 1st Lieutenant of the company - who had died in Cork. The date was May 2nd, 1917, and it was on this day also that the R.I.C. succeeded in removing the flag which had been flying on Mourne Abbey Castle since the anniversary of the Rising. The full company paraded at the funeral under Liam Jones, O/C, and the coffin was draped with the tricolour.

When the party who had been arrested in connection

with the incident of the flag at Analeentha were being tried at Mallow Petty Sessions Court in July, 1917, the Mourne Abbey Company, to the number of about 80, marched to Mallow. The R.I.C. attempted to break up the parade and there were a number of baton charges in which several members of the R.I.C., as well as some Volunteers, were injured. The prisoners ("Pats" Curtin, Tim Riordan, Jerh. Cronin and John Cronin), who were found guilty, were ordered to enter into bail bonds to be of good behaviour for twelve months or in default to serve two months in gaol. "Pats" Curtin and Tim Riordan signed the bail bonds on the day of the trial, while Jerh. and John Cronin refused to sign. The latter were then removed to Cork Jail but within a few days they, too, signed the bonds and were released.

In September, 1917, Seán Sullivan from Cork City arrived in the area as organiser. He came just prior to the date of Tom Ashe's death on hunger-strike in Mountjoy Prison on September 25th, 1917. This event led to a revival of the national spirit in the area. On the day of Tom Ashe's funeral all Volunteers in the area, as well as a large body of the general public, formed up at Analeentha and marched to the church, where The Rosary was recited. From this day onwards the Volunteers in the district grew stronger in numbers and in spirit.

About this time all Volunteers were engaged in organising the political wing of the Republican movement - Sinn Féin. A unit of Cumann na mBan was also established at this time. The pioneer members in these organisations were:

Sinn Féin

"Pats" Curtin (Chairman)
 Tim Looney (Secretary)
 Con Regan (Witness)
 Paddy McCarthy.

Cumann na mBan

Kitty McCarthy
 Mollie O'Leary
 Ellen Mullane
 Maria Jones.

The Volunteers continued their normal training at this time and when conscription was threatened in the spring of 1918 there was a big influx of new recruits. At this time the strength of the Mourne Abbey Company was about 140. It was decided to divide the company into two units - Burnfort and Analeentha. The officers of the new units were, I think:

Burnfort

O/C - Mick Hanlon
 1st Lt. - Mick Nagle
 2nd Lt. - Maurice Walsh.

Analeentha

O/C - Jerome Buckley
 1st Lt. - Con O'Regan
 2nd Lt. - Jack Looney
 Q/M - Wm. Cronin.

It was about this time that the area was organised on a battalion basis. The new units became members of the Mallow Battalion. The other companies in the battalion were: Mallow, Glantane, Ahadillane. The officers of the Mallow Battalion were: -

O/C - Liam Jones
 Vice O/C - Jerh. Buckley
 Adj. - Paddy McCarthy
 Q/M - Mick Nagle.

When Mick Hanlon left the area in the middle of 1918 and Mick Nagle was elected Battalion Q/M, the officers of the Burnfort Company became:

O/C - Jack Sullivan)
 1st Lt. - Maurice Walsh) These positions may
 2nd Lt. - Mick Looney) have been reversed.

As there was no contest in the area - Tom Hunter, the Sinn Féin candidate, being returned unopposed - there was no activity in connection with the general election in December, 1918. About forty members of the company travelled to Waterford City to carry out protection duty for the Sinn Féin election workers.

Cork 11 Brigade was formed in January, 1919, and Mallow Battalion became a unit of this brigade. At this time the companies in the battalion were: Analeentha, Ahadillane, Glantane, Burnfort, Mallow and Dromahane. There was no change in the officers of the battalion. The officers of the new brigade were:

O/C - Liam Lynch, Fermoy.
 Vice O/C - Dan Hegarty, Mallow.
 Adjt.- Tom Barry, Glanworth.
 Q/M - George Power, Fermoy.

The battalions in the new brigade were: Mallow, Fermoy, Castletownroche, Newmarket, Kanturk, Charleville, Millstreet.

In December, 1919, I went to Cork to work on the Cork and Macroom railway. I then joined 'C' Company, 2nd Battalion, Cork 1 Brigade. The Company O/C was Peter Donovan and I cannot recollect the names of the other officers. I was attached to the Signals" Section of the company. My immediate superior officer was Section Leader Luke Callaghan.

At the beginning of 1920, with several other members of 'C' Company I took part in a raid on an army stores in Queen St., where a number of cycles and motor were seized. I took away two cycles and dumped them at the Macroom station where I was employed. Incidentally,

the Company O/C (Peter Donovan), who took away a motor cycle, had a crash and, as a result of the accident, had to have one of his legs amputated. He was replaced as O/C by Wm. Power.

When the first spy - Quinlisk - was shot in Cork in February, 1920, I was on duty in the South Terrace area.

With all members of the Second Battalion I took part in the funeral of Tomás MacCurtain (Lord Mayor) who was murdered by R.I.C. men on March 19th, 1920.

All members of my section of 'C' Company were engaged on the destruction of the Income Tax offices, South Mall, Cork, at Easter, 1920. Our duty was to ensure that if the fire brigade arrived, the members would be unable to extinguish the fire. We had instructions to cut all hoses as they were laid on by the brigade.

While not engaged in the close-up activities of many of the engagements, I found myself on duty practically every night on one duty or another, e.g. acting as scout, outpost duty or carrying dispatches.

When a party of British military were ambushed in Barrack St. in October, 1920, I was a member of the party delegated to cover off Tuckey St. R.I.C. barracks to ensure that no one left the barracks while the Barrack St. operation was being carried out. One British soldier was killed in Barrack St. The I.R.A. had no casualties.

I was dismissed from the Cork and Macroom railway

in November, 1920, for refusing to act as guard on a train carrying British military personnel. I then returned home to Mourne Abbey and rejoined the Analeentha Company. With the other members of the company I took part in the normal activities of the unit, which included scouting and outpost duty for the Brigade Column which was in the area for occasional spells.

Late in December, 1920, Battalion H.Q. ordered the establishment of night patrols in each company area. These patrols were under orders to open fire on any enemy troops found in the area should the conditions be advantageous to the I.R.A. This action was intended to force the enemy to abandon night raiding, which was much in evidence at this time. On the night of January 6th, 1921, I was engaged on this duty with Ned Donoghue when a convoy of three lorries of military approached our district from the direction of Mallow. They were travelling on the main Cork-Mallow road. At Jordan's Bridge - approximately $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles on the Cork side of Mourne Abbey - they turned for Analeentha. As we were in position on this road we opened fire on the second and third lorries. They drove off at speed. When this party reached the area in which they intended to carry out their raid - Ned Water's home at Glashabhuide - only one lorry remained there. The other lorries returned to Mallow. When the yard surrounding Ned Water's house at Glasabhuide was examined next morning several newspapers smeared with blood were discovered. It was accepted at the time that the urgent departure of the two lorries of military from the raiding area was due to the necessity for attending to the number wounded by the charges of buckshot fired by our patrol.

This was, I think, the last occasion on which the enemy carried out night raids in the district.

On January 7th, 1921, I returned to Cork City to resume duty with the Cork and Macroom railway and to rejoin "C" Company, 2nd Battalion, Cork 1 Brigade. I took part in the normal activities of the unit until the evening of February 15th, 1921, when I read on the "Evening Echo" (evening edition of "Cork Examiner") of the Mourné Abbey ambush. I immediately reported to my Section Leader in "C" Company that I was returning to Mourné Abbey.

On my return I joined the Battalion Column under the control of Jack Cunningham (Column Leader). Other members of the column were: Tadhg McCarthy, Joe Morgan, John Moloney ("Congo"), Leo O'Callaghan, Jerh. Daly, Ned Waters, Tadhg Mullane, Batt. Walsh, Ned Murphy. I joined the column at Glantane where they were billeted at Gneeves. Within a few days I was appointed Battalion O/C Signals.

On the night of March 9th and morning of March 10th, 1921, I was on guard duty with Jack Winters or Denis Mulcahy at Derrygowna Cross until 2 a.m. The column (Mallow), as well as the Kanturk Column, were acting as guards for Brigade H.Q. which was now situated at McCarthy's, Nadd. It was a foggy, dark night. While on duty, a cyclist - Michael Kiely, an I.R.A. dispatch rider - approached us about 11 p.m. He was looking for Brigade H.Q. We directed him to McCarthy's where the Brigade O/C (Liam Lynch) and staff were billeted. When he returned to Derrygowna Cross - it was now about 1 a.m. - he asked me if he could "get on the

column" (he had been asking to be taken on each time he came with dispatches). I told him that there was a chance that there would be a spare rifle next day as some of the column had gone to Fr. Murphy's Bridge to ambush an enemy patrol. He then asked to be allowed to stay with us until the others returned. As the night was exceptionally bad I went with him to "The Barracks" (where other members of the column were billeted) and arranged for him to take up my billet there, while I moved further up the road to Kelliher's. I billeted there with Tom Callaghan and another member of the column.

We were sleeping peacefully at about 7 a.m. on March 10th when the alarm was raised. We were informed that the area was surrounded by military. We collected our equipment and moved out towards Herlihy's ("The Barracks"). When we had gone about 150 yards - visibility was beginning to improve - we saw what appeared to be a military lorry on the bridge on the Inchmay road. We immediately jumped the roadside fence and under cover of same we crawled in the direction of the bridge. We eventually reached the bridge and took cover under the "eye" of same. From this point we made our way to "The Barracks" where we found the place deserted. The cobblestones in the yard showed much blood and, in addition, an effort had been made to burn down the house.

It was now daylight and from our position we could see the military party on the bridge on Inchmay road. We were about to take a few shots at them when we observed that there were a number of civilians amongst

the party, including Tom Bride, the owner of the publichouse in Nadd. We also noticed our comrade Shields of the Kanturk Column. We thought that he had been taken prisoner but we noted that he was wearing a military cap. As, in the circumstances, we could do nothing, we decided to withdraw. With Tom Callaghan I withdrew across the mountain towards O'Brien's, Inchmay. The fog descended suddenly. We continued walking for about three hours, when we finally reached a roadway. We had moved about 200 yards along the road when a house loomed up out of the fog. We then discovered that we had been walking round in a circle and were still within about a half mile from "The Barracks". At this stage we had no idea of what had happened there. We then struck across the mountain to Gleanncoum. We called to a house here and found the occupants on their knees reciting The Rosary. There was consternation when we walked in as I was supposed to have been shot at "The Barracks". We had not made contact with the other members of the column or with the Brigade Staff and we moved on to Tadhg McCarthy's house at Gneeves, where Jim McCarthy informed us that he had instructions to tell all column men to report to Beeing. We proceeded to Beeing where we met some members of the column (Mallow) and I was prevailed upon by Dr. Ryan (the local M.O.) to go home so that my parents could be assured that I was alive.

About this time the column was more or less disbanded. Individual members were engaged in training the members of the local companies. This continued for about two weeks, when I was then sent by the Battalion O/C

(Tadhg Byrne) to organise and train a signals unit at Ballyclough. When I returned from this job we were all engaged in ensuring that all roads in the area were trenched, bridges demolished and all enemy lines of communication kept cut. In addition, the members of the Mallow Column were engaged on protection duty for Brigade H.Q., which about this time and for varying periods was at Myles McCarthy's, Creggane.

I should have mentioned that after Mourne Abbey ambush Tadhg Looney resigned from his position as Battalion Vice O/C. The officers of the Mallow Battalion now were:

O/C - Tadhg Byrne
 Vice O/C - Ned Murphy
 Adjt.- Jerry Hanlon
 Q/M - Mick Nagle
 O/C Signals - Con O'Regan.

When the 1st Southern Division was established the Battalion Vice O/C (Ned Murphy) joined the Brigade Staff as Quartermaster and he was replaced on the Battalion Staff by Jerry Hanlon. The battalion officers at this stage were:

O/C - Tadhg Byrne
 Vice O/C - Jerry Hanlon
 Adjt.- Tadhg McCarthy
 Q/M - Mick Nagle
 O/C Signals - Con O'Regan.

During the period to the Truce individual members of the column sniped the military and Black and Tan barracks on a couple of nights each week,

while on a few occasions ambushes were laid for enemy patrols which failed to put in an appearance.

About mid May, 1921, accompanied by Jerry Hanlon I drove into Mallow in a pony and trap to arrest a suspected spy named McPherson. We called to a barber's shop in Bridge St. adjacent to McPherson's house. We went into the shop to await a report from the intelligence section as to the whereabouts of McPherson, but before the information reached us we were warned by a member of Cumann na mBan to leave the town immediately as the military were aware that we were in town. We left the town without delay and only barely evaded the enemy party which was sent to look for us. McPherson was later taken prisoner in Mallow by three unarmed members of Dromahane Company (Denis Barrow and two others). He was taken to Dromahane where he was detained until he was tried that night at a meeting of the Battalion Staff. He was found guilty of spying for the enemy and was sentenced to be shot. The findings were confirmed by Brigade H.Q. and the sentence was carried out the same night on the Fiddane road about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Mallow. This was, I think, the week before the Truce.

My rank at the Truce was - O/C Signals, Mallow Battalion. The strength of the battalion was about 600.

Signed:

Cornelius O'Regan
(Cornelius O'Regan)

Date:

28th June 1933

Witness:

P. O'Donnell (P. O'Donnell)
(Investigator)

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